Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell IV On New Media in Military Operations

An Interview with Commander of the US Army's Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth Kansas

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted by the editor of IO Sphere with LTG Caldwell via email exchange. Mr. Anton Menning assisted with the completion of the interview. Mr. Menning is a member of LTG Caldwell's staff and co-authors numorus articles with him. We sincerely thank both of them.

IO Sphere Editor: Sir, at IO Sphere we consider your documented views, insights, and leadership on emerging information technologies to be at the cutting edge of operational thinking. I want to first thank you for your time and for sharing your thoughts with the readers of IO Sphere.

LTG Caldwell: It's a pleasure to engage with IO Sphere. As you are no doubt aware, today's operational environment is very dynamic. The U.S. Army must adapt to that environment. Some traditional means of communication have become less relevant, and the rise of Web 2.0 confronts us with a fresh set of challenges and opportunities.

IO Sphere Editor: Sir, it is well known that you have strong views on emerging information technologies, including blogs, personal video sharing sites such as "youtube" and social networking media like "Facebook" and "Twitter." You have already referred to these "New Media" technologies and capabilities as "Web 2.0." Many military leaders express varying degrees of concern over these technologies and their application. What are your views? Should we ignore the promise and surrender to our misgivings or should we embrace these technologies and adapt them to our advantage as we confront the future?

LTG Caldwell: Web 2.0, or social media, provides unique opportunities for interaction. One-way communication models are horse-and-buggy. People around the world are now both consumers and contributors. The open-ended and even democratic nature of the new media allows users to bypass traditional gatekeepers such as editors and producers. The capacity for "bypass" also allows users of new media to set agendas and to construct online communities.

For these reasons and more, it is vital for the U.S. military to actively engage in these spheres. Our adversaries are adept at doing just that for their own purposes. Why should we cede the high ground by ignoring or shortchanging the new media? Many of our senior leaders may be digital migrants, but it is important to remember that our young Soldiers are digital natives. They instinctively embrace the world of Web 2.0. In more ways than ever before, the new media can tell our Army's story to the American people. Even in a season of economic downturn, when business woes dominate the conventional news cycle, the new media allows us to continue informing the American people about the tremendous service and sacrifices of our Soldiers and their families.

.IO Sphere Editor: Some senior US and allied military leaders are concerned about the operational security implications of new media technology and the possibility of disclosure of both classified and unclassified critical information to adversaries. As a supporter of the use of new media, how do you address these concerns?

Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell IV

LTG Caldwell: Operational security is an enduring concern for military operations. However, we cannot take counsel of our fears at the expense of new media applications. As always, we must strike a balance between caution and engagement. As new technologies continue to emerge, there will be even more challenges to the risk/benefit balance. If we surrender to our fears, we surrender a big chunk of the high media ground. Commanders accept risk in any operation. We are not talking about rejection of risk, but rather about the parameters of the risk, we're willing to accept. With the emphasis, senior leaders are placing on Web 2.0, I remain confident the Army will find the proper balance.

IO Sphere Editor: Many of your views about new media center on the "Strategic Communications" value inherent in the new media technologies.

Do you think there is a downside to these technologies to the extent that they involve tradeoffs of traditional control in favor of engagement and of traditional media in favor of untested and less reliable media?

LTG Caldwell: Change is a constant in life. We must embrace in fact consider it an opportunity if we are to be effective leaders. The contemporary evolution of the news industry is simply a fact we need to adjust to. By actively engaging the new media, we are availing ourselves of more opportunities than ever to tell the Army's story. Last year, a Pew Poll revealed that the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan failed to make the top 15 news stories of the year. Even if only a snapshot, such results demonstrate an important disconnect between the American public and the life-or-death concerns of those who serve in uniform. New media can help us bridge this gap.

The American people can now digest our story without a filter.

IO Sphere Editor: In the May-June issue of Military Review Mr. Dennis Murphy, Mr. Anton Menning, and you co-authored an article titled, "Learning to Leverage New Media." To buttress your thesis on the importance of the new media, you referred to recent Israeli military operations in Lebanon and Gaza as examples of both good and bad use of new media. What do you think about reporting on the recent demonstrations in Iran over disputed election results as still another and more recent example of new media's reach?

LTG Caldwell: The new media definitely held their ground, and with an impressive degree of power. We are learning that it has become almost impossible to stop the flow of information from a given country, especially if the population is

Iraqi officer using computer as part of an advanced computing class
Source: defenseimagery.mil

US Marine Using Tactical Computer in Kwaitt
Source: defenseimagery.mil

technically adept. Even as traditional media was largely shut out, new media emerged to inform the world of events in near real time. Beyond Iran, look at the recent events in Moldova – Twitter is showing just how dynamic it is because of its ability to function across multiple platforms. We are witnessing a democratic revolution in how information is disseminated. As senior leaders, we must be familiar with new media and be aware of how it can shape and affect operations. However, there is no such thing as the proverbial free ride. We must know how to utilize new media, and we must understand its capabilities and limitations.

IO Sphere Editor: As the commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth Kansas you play a very important role in the education of future military leaders. What ideas or focus areas have you recently instituted to stress the importance of these technologies and their effective employment in the contemporary operational environment?

LTG Caldwell: One of our biggest programs requires all students who attend the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College to blog as a requirement for graduation. They must also complete three other outreach requirements, including writing an article for publication and submitting it, participating in a news interview (print, radio, television) and undertaking some

sort of public engagement, for example formally addressing an audience. These requirements serve to educate our future leaders and to ensure they are comfortable telling the Army story.

To facilitate blogging, we founded a blog library that now has more than 40 blogs and 100,000 visits per month. It is utilized by many of our subordinate organizations to solicit feedback on public events, to disseminate information about upcoming opportunities here at CAC, and engage a broader audience on a variety of issues ranging from training for full spectrum operations to helping Soldiers stay safe when riding motorcycles.

In fact, COL Mark McKnight, the commander of Battle Command Training Program – a sort of virtual Combat Training Center – wrote a letter that was published in the August issue of Army Magazine where he described the benefits of using blogging as an organization. He said the value of openly sharing "best practices" and "how-tos" in a transparent manner, within the constraints of operational security, helps the public understand an element of the Combined Arms Center and therefore, our Army.

Another of our subordinate organizations, the Information Operations Proponent, trains FA30's or Information Operations specialists. Within its curriculum, instructors teach students the basics of Web 2.0 with the understanding those specialists

will often advise their superiors on the nuances of social media. An additional part of the curriculum requires the students to write a paper discussing the pros and cons of allowing Soldiers access to social media sites. They are also instructed about how adversaries use social media to influence the American public.

Beyond blogging, we started a CAC YouTube page, a Twitter site and a Facebook page. The challenge we face with much of this activity is resourcing it while simultaneously establishing sound operating procedures. I suspect many organizations across the Department of Defense are working through some of these same issues.

Our use of new media does not stop with what I've already mentioned. CAC-Training established the Army Training Network earlier this spring. Instead of publishing a companion manual to our capstone-training manual, we've made the process virtual. Through ATN, trainers throughout the Army learn best training practices across a wide field of specialties. Any Soldier or civilian with a common access card can update the site with their specific insights. The site even features a wiki that is self updated and policed by our community of users.

Finally, on July 2nd, we began a pilot program that converted seven field manuals into a wiki format that will make them living, breathing documents under the rubric of Army Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, or ATTP. We plan to eventually convert more than 200 field manuals into wikis. By using a wiki, we can ensure that the lessons learned in the field are rapidly assimilated and disseminated to the operational force. Moreover, wikis allow for enhanced collaboration across the entire Army, including its civilian work force. After 90 days, we will assess the pilot program and determine a course for the way ahead with this project.

IO Sphere Editor: How do you consider the knowledge of these technologies and the ability to employ them in operations? Can effectiveness in their utilization be equated with effectively operating in the field or employing a weapon system?

LTG Caldwell: Absolutely. Soldiers today require core competencies that embrace the full spectrum of operations – from peacekeeping to the employment of kinetic means. Whatever the situation, we know that future operations will be conducted among the people. The ability to communicate across a wide variety of platforms will remain central to reaching various audiences for various reasons. We must never cede either the ground on which we choose to engage or the means.
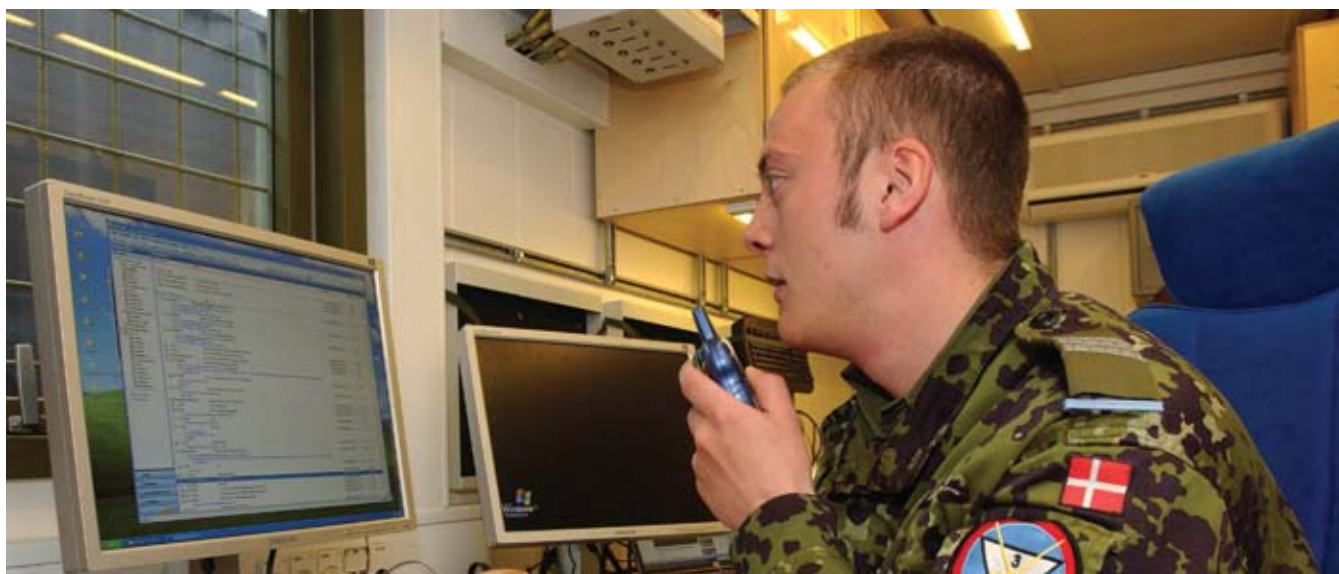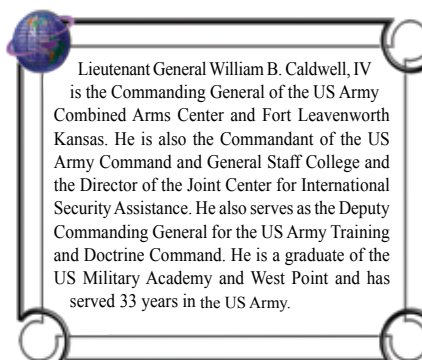
IO Sphere Editor: Sir, thank you for your time and your leadership on this subject. At IO Sphere, we strive to challenge our readership to think about and create solutions to many difficult and controversial subjects in Information Operations. Your views and leadership on the use of new media in military operations are an important addition to the dialogue and we appreciate it very much.

LTG Caldwell: Thank you for this opportunity. I have enjoyed the opportunity to engage on such important subjects.

Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell, IV is the Commanding General of the US Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth Kansas. He is also the Commandant of the US Army Command and General Staff College and the Director of the Joint Center for International Security Assistance. He also serves as the Deputy Commanding General for the US Army Training and Doctrine Command. He is a graduate of the US Military Academy and West Point and has served 33 years in the US Army.

Soldier from Denmark During NATO Exercise Combined Endeavor
Source: defenseimagery.mil